

Dr. Joseph Warren

The Forgotten Revolutionary Patriot

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By:

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Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, my fellow presenter and members of The Athenaeum Society:

Gentlemen, I have a confession to make tonight. While I have a B.A. degree in History, I did not concentrate my historical studies in the American Revolution but rather on topics on the lead up and causes of the Civil War, the War itself and the aftermath including Reconstruction.

Since I in the past few years have discovered that I am a direct descendant of 5 Revolutionary Patriots on my dad's side and at least 4 on my mom's side. That fact has caused me to study more closely the causes of that War and the Patriots that spoke and urged the call for a break from Britain. Of course, I know about Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, Paul Revere. But then I came across a name with which was not familiar, but in the estimation of most, stands as tall as the aforementioned Patriots. The title of tonight's paper is "Dr. Joseph Warren: The Forgotten Revolutionary Patriot."

Joseph Warren was born in Roxbury Province of Massachusetts Bay to Joseph Warren and Mary Stevens Warren on June 11, 1741. His father was a respected farmer who died in October of 1755 when he fell off a ladder while gathering fruit from his orchard when Joseph, Jr. was only 15.

After attending the Roxbury Latin School, Joseph enrolled at Harvard College graduating in 1759 at the age of 18! He taught at Roxbury Latin School for about a year. He studied medicine and made his money the old fashioned way... he married into it! He married 18 year old heiress Elizabeth Hooten on September 6, 1764. To this union four children were born, Elizabeth, Joseph, Mary and Richard.

He became in short order, a very prominent physician in Boston and counted among his patients, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Paul Revere and other Patriots.

He got involved with politics associating with Samuel Adams, John Hancock and other leaders of the broad movement labeled Sons of Liberty. (As an aside, the Sons of Liberty often met at the Green

Dragon Tavern in Boston. While attending a National Drug Court Conference in Boston several years ago, wife Betty and I had lunch at the Green Dragon Tavern. It is in the same location and has been in continued existence all this time.)

In February of 1770, Christopher Seider, the 11 year old son of poor German immigrants, joined a crowd of protesters outside the house of Ebenezer Richardson in the North End. Richardson was a customs service employee who had tried to disperse a protest in front of the shop of Loyalist Theophilus Lillie. The crowd threw stones which broke Richardson's windows and struck his wife. Richardson fired a gun into the crowd, wounding Seider in the arm and chest. The boy died later that evening. Samuel Adams arranged for the funeral, which was attended by more than 2,000 people. Dr. Warren performed the autopsy on the boy, which greatly moved Dr. Warren and further heightened his resolve against British rule. Seider's death and large public funeral fueled public outrage which reached a peak in the Boston Massacre 11 days later. Dr. Warren was a member of the committee that assembled a report on the Boston Massacre. Earlier in 1768, Royal officials tried to

place his publishers on trial for an incendiary newspaper essay Warren wrote under the pseudonym A True Patriot, but no local jury would indict them.

As Boston's conflict with the royal government came to a head in 1773-1775, Warren was appointed to the Boston Committee of Correspondence. He twice delivered speeches in commemoration of the Boston Massacre, once while dressed in a Roman toga, a symbol of freedom. Warren drafted the Suffolk Resolves, which were endorsed by the Continental Congress, to advocate resistance to Parliament's Intolerable Acts. He was appointed President of The Massachusetts Provincial Congress, the highest position in the revolutionary government.

In mid-April 1775, Warren and Dr. Benjamin Church were the two top members of the Committee of Correspondence left in Boston. On the afternoon of April 18, 1775, the British troops mobilized for a long-planned raid on the nearby towns of Concord and already before nightfall word of mouth had spread knowledge of the mobilization

widely within Boston. It had been known to rebel leadership for weeks that General Gage in Boston had plans to destroy munitions stored in Concord by the colonials, and it was also known that they would be taking a route through Lexington. Warren learned that there was a British expedition likely to begin that night and so sent William Dawes and Paul Revere to warn Hancock and Adams in Lexington on their famous "midnight rides."

Warren slipped out of Boston early on April 19 and during that day's Battle of Lexington and Concord, he coordinated and led the militia into the fight alongside William Heath as the British Army returned to Boston. When the British were returning from Concord, he was among the foremost in hanging upon their rear and assailing their flanks. During this fighting Warren was nearly killed, a musket ball striking part of his wig. When his mother saw him after the battle and heard of his escape, she entreated him with tears again not to risk his life. "Where danger is, dear mother, there must your son be. Now is not the time for any of America's children to shrink from any hazard. I will set her free or die" was his answer. He then returned to organizing

soldiers for the Siege of Boston, promulgating the Patriots version of events and negotiating with Gen. Gage as President of the Provincial Congress.

Warren was commissioned as a major general by the Provincial Congress on June 14, 1775. Several days later, in the moments before the Battle of Bunker Hill, Warren arrived where the militia was forming and asked where the heaviest fighting would be; General Israel Putnam pointed to Breed's Hill. Warren volunteered to join the fighting as a private against the wishes of General Putnam and Colonel William Prescott, both of whom requested that he serve as their commander. Warren declined the command in the belief that Putnam and Prescott were more experienced with war. He was among those inspiring the men to hold the line against superior numbers. Warren was known to have repeatedly declared of the British: "These fellows say we won't fight! By Heaven, I hope I shall die up to my knees in blood!"

He fought in the redoubt until out of ammunition and remained until the British made their third and final assault on the hill to give time

for the militia to escape. He was killed instantly by a musket or pistol ball squarely between the eyes by a British officer who recognized him or by the officer's servant. His body was stripped of clothing and he was bayoneted until unrecognizable and then shoved into a ditch.

British Captain Walter Laurie later said he “stuffed the scoundrel with another rebel into one hole and there he and his seditious principals may remain!”

In a letter to John Adams, Benjamin Hichborn describes the damage that British Lieutenant James Drew, of the sloop Scorpion, inflicted on Warren's body two days after the Battle of Bunker Hill: "In a day or two after, Drew went upon the Hill again opened the dirt that was thrown over Doctor: Warren, spit in his face jumped on his stomach and at last cut off his head and committed every act of violence upon his body.”

His body was exhumed ten months after his death by his brother and Paul Revere. Paul Revere identified his remains by the artificial



tooth that Revere had constructed for him and installed in his jaw which quite probably is the first instance of forensic pathology in the history of America. He was 34 when he died as a martyr for his new country.

He was buried the Granary Burying Ground and later moved in 1825 in St. Paul's Church before finally being moved to his family's vault in Forest Hills Cemetery in 1855.

In conclusion, 14 counties are named for Joseph Warren in the United States (including Warren County in Kentucky and Tennessee) as well as several cities and townships. So why is he not as well known as some of the other Patriots and not mentioned with others in the pantheon of Patriots? Perhaps because he died so young and so early in the Revolution. One historian opines that had he not died so early in the Revolution he may have eclipsed George Washington. But tonight, we remember this American Patriot and salute his sacrifice.

Thank you!